

## Observations

on

The manner of Living and Diseases  
of the Slaves on the Wateree River  
By William L. McCaa

of Camden

Presented as an Inaugural Essay  
to the Faculty of Medicine  
in the University of Pennsylvania

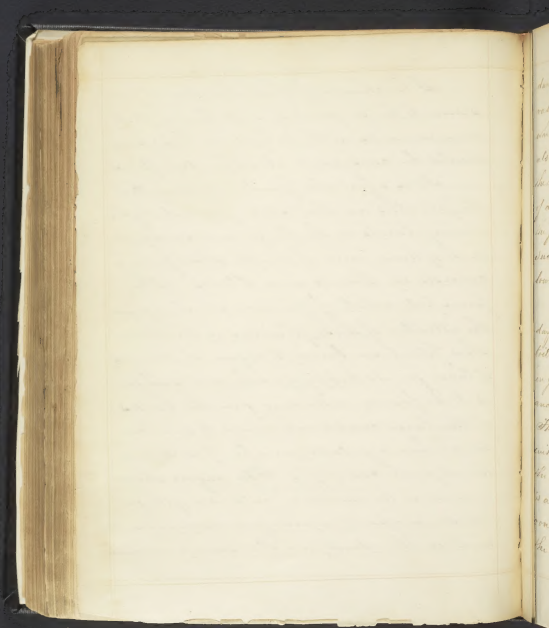
Philadelphia 1823

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1817

The climate of South Carolina I presume to be so generally well known, that any remarks on the subject in this essay, would be considered altogether superfluous.

It is a fact also familiar to many, that the "planters" in that state, particularly the owning lands on the larger water-courses, are, most of them, men of wealth, whose fortunes consists in Lands and Slaves. The principal article of produce which engages the attention of these planters, is the Cotton; this plant we know to require the strongest of land for its happy growth, and such land is to be found extending from the banks of the large creeks and rivers, to some one, two, or even a greater number of miles into the adjacent country. The negro's who are engaged in the immediate cultivation of the cotton are necessarily exposed from morning until night in the atmosphere of a swamp, undan-



damp and foul by the exhalations from the vast number of stagnant ponds and lakes which are always to <sup>be</sup> seen in such situations, and also the effluvia arising from the banks of the river, as the water recedes in consequence of dry weather, or from previous increases from the fall of rain, which not infrequently is in such quantity as to inundate the whole of the lowlands and blight the prospects of the planters.

Nor are the slaves only oppressed during the day, for when night returns them of their toil they repair to little filthy huts, situated in general, on the very margin of the waters, and there in crowded numbers subsist. Their food is principally indian meal with probably some little bacon or lard, the water of the river, which in the summer is always warm, and in the winter almost constantly muddy is their only drink, the most of them are well clothed—

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Thus far I have made but a statement  
 of facts; and can any one look over them  
 without asking the question, do not great num-  
 bers of these unfortunate beings find relief from  
 their troubles, by the annual visitation of sick-  
 ness and its consequences? or will I be credited  
 when I assert that they enjoy as good health  
 as any similar number of persons situated  
 on our most healthy sand hills? however  
 strange it may appear, it is not less true, and  
 to account for it, may puzzle those of more ex-  
 perience than myself. Shall we say that  
 it is the constant exercise which they take,  
 and the simple manner in which they live  
 that defends them from the exciting causes of  
 disease? These circumstances may have no  
 little influence in contributing to their health  
 but taken alone, they will not solve the problem  
 for occasionally some poor white man engages  
 in the same business and lives with and like  
 them, but no such person is ever known to  
 escape an attack of fever. May we not then  
 say that there is something peculiar in the



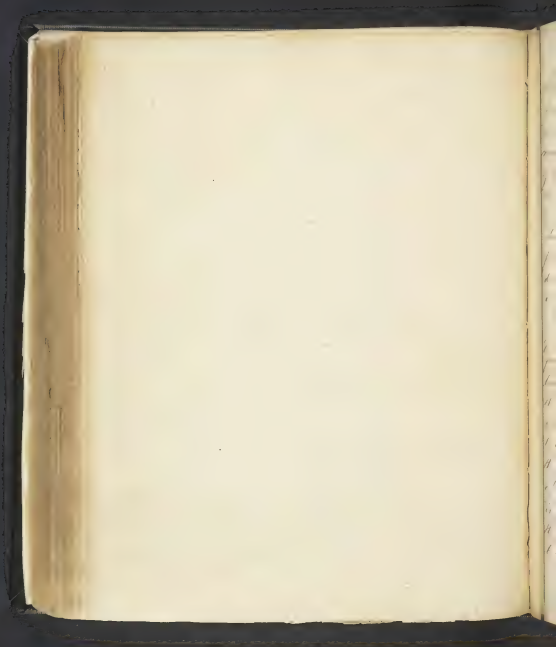


constitution of the blackman, which enabled him to enjoy health in an atmosphere, where his master does not venture, and urge this as a reason or submit it as an argument to prove they should be slaves; Such an opinion it is true I have heard advanced, to prove the fallacy of which however I shall not recur to any reasoning on the subject, but merely state one single fact. Three gentlemen of my acquaintance made purchase of slaves brought from Virginia, amounting in number to about forty five; these were placed on three different plantations, with numbers of the former residents of those places, of this number scarce one single individual of the whole escaped sickness, and one third of them died during the first summer; and yet the older inhabitants were healthy.

As it is not my design to engage in speculation, I shall for the present attribute the fact to the benevolence of creative wisdom who, having given to man the privilege of living under almost any temperature, may not



I have a number  
 of that school the  
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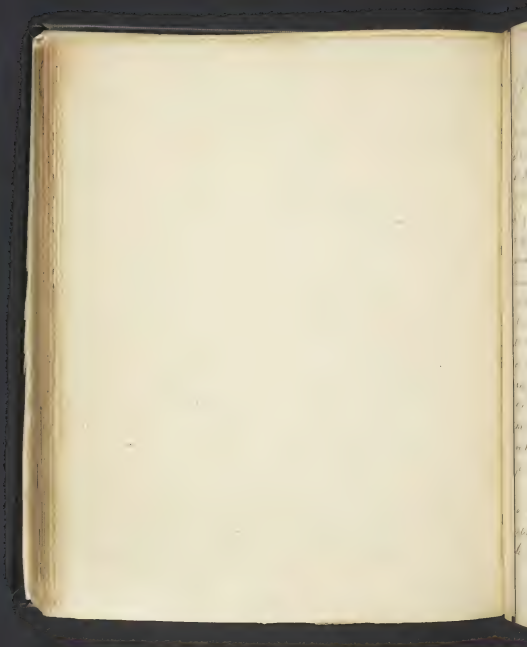
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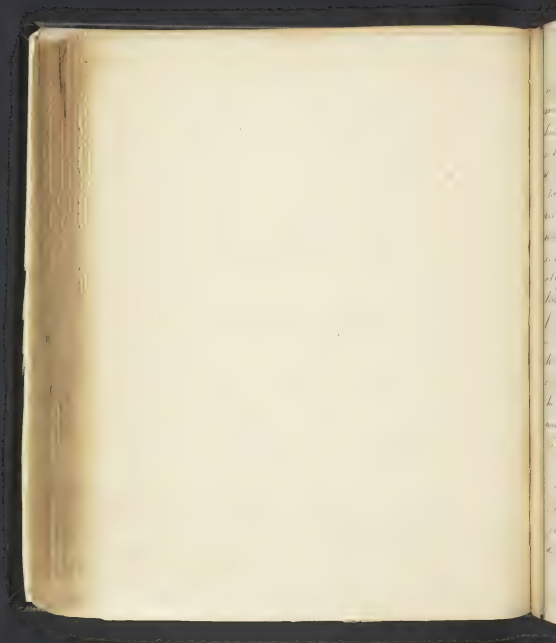


I have been thinking of you a great deal lately  
 and wondering how you are getting on. I hope  
 you are well and happy. I am well at present.  
 I have been very busy lately.

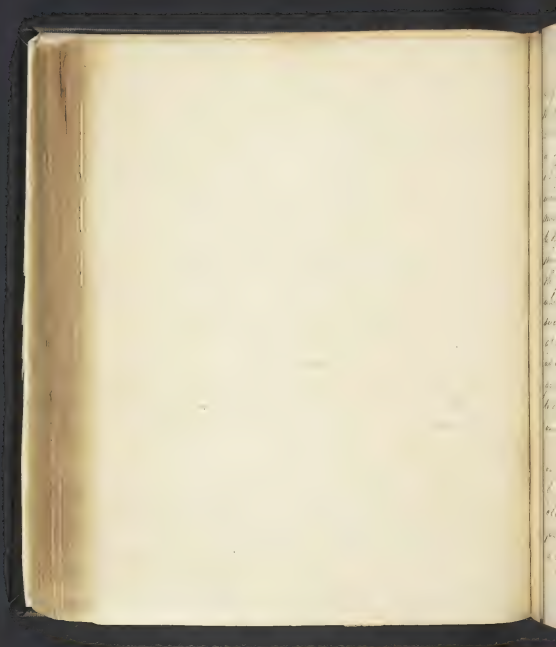
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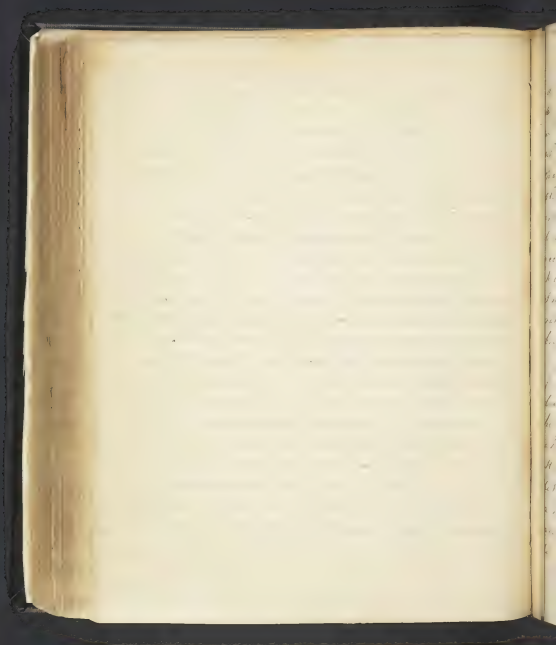
I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you.













and region. What I have to say on this subject perfectly coincides with the above statement; for even the wealthy and dissipated portion of society, who enjoy the genial sun of South Carolina, perform this operation with but little difficulty, and the slaves who united with the advantages of climate extreme simplicity of life, and who are strangers to deformity, a difficult labour is truly of rare occurrence; and the following facts may show, how easy is the operation with them generally, for I mention these not as astonishing cases, but, rather to prove the facility with which they bring forth their young.

A gentleman on whom I could rely informed me that one of his slaves, a girl about eighteen years of age, pregnant with her first child was surprised by nature when a few weeks in a field a mile or two from the settlement. She made an attempt to reach her hut, but fatigue occasioned her to seek rest under a neighbouring tree, and whilst there, without any human assistance was relieved of her burden; the child she took to her house which



lived and was hearty, the girl went to her work in a few days. A practitioner of respectability related to me a similar case; he was called to visit a woman in labour four or five miles from town, when he saw her there was no symptoms of approaching labour, and after several hours delay he was induced to make examinations, when to his astonishment there was no child to be distinguished, the fact was, that the woman had delivered herself in the field and concealed her offspring which was dead, and had probably gone to bed to avoid work.

As might be expected the children are particularly liable to, and troubled with worms, and here I would say, that in the practice of medicine the *Melia Azedarach* is not duly appreciated, for it is extensively used in vulgar practice with some feinting success, in cases of the round worms, I believe its narcotic or noxious properties depend on or exist in the outer bark which should always be removed.

W. L. M.  
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